

Theatres and their New Plays

Carefully Built 'Situations' Fall Flat in Some New Plays

Scenes Expertly Contrived and Intended to Be Highly Effective Often Leave Audiences Unmoved in the Theatre.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE modern playwright should, we can all understand, despise the so-called "situation" as he would any other archaic device of Sardou-deldom. It would be shockingly old fashioned to revive in this enlightened day any such mechanical trick of the well made play. Who among contemporaneous dramatists would have the courage to be so reactionary?

If such a person exists, it may be Winchell Smith. He has proved himself a skilful disciple of the disregarded rules of yesteryear. Maybe he is aware of the great effectiveness of an absorbingly interesting situation. He has contrived them very expertly in some of his plays. Any man who took so much time in devising a situation and then in making it work on the spectators for all it is worth cannot be ignorant of its value.

The third act of "The Wheel," at the Gaiety Theatre, contains an incident which the author evidently expected to be most telling. In the famous gambling scene, the victim of the frame-up to teach him the error of his ways finds himself bankrupt. In order to adjust his affairs, it is necessary to summon the proprietor. The manager refuses to allow him further credit. The owner is called. There is the pause of a second. The patron, expecting the arrival of a man of the kind usually found in such a position, suddenly finds himself face to face with his wife. She is the proprietor of this palace of chance.

The old time bunglers who wrote the artificial plays that amused the weakminded theatregoers of the past would have called this a "situation" in the fullest sense of the word. It would have been accounted by these old fashioned writers, who in the opinion of the latest comment on the theatre range from Shakespeare to Pinter, moreover, a very stirring situation. But it is nothing of the kind in "The Wheel." There is no more suspense or excitement on the part of the spectators than if the young woman had popped in to brush the furniture.

Yet the posture of circumstances here, to use a phrase appropriate to such a rococo doctrine, is in itself exciting. Even a man hopelessly addicted to games of chance does not expect to find his wife in charge of the very house in which he has just lost \$35,000. He ought to be surprised. Still more surprised should be the spectators who are supposed to be moved by the emotions of the characters in a play.

Nobody is in the least excited during the third act of "The Wheel." Grateful as the public may be to him for good work in the past, the fault here must lie at the door of the playwright. Something is wrong in his preparation for the climax of this scene or the effect which he devised would not so utterly flash in the pan. The writer of this comment would never attempt to explain what that fault may be when so expert a playwright as Mr. Smith has failed to detect it in the making of his play. Possibly the audience has been kept in too complete ignorance of the wife's plan. Some preparation by the appearance of the wife earlier in the scene so that even if her husband were ignorant of her plot the spectators at least knew something if not all about it—maybe some such expedient might have tended to interest the audience more in her appearance. On the other hand, the minds of the spectators may have failed completely. In any case, it is grossly presumptuous to give advice to any writer who has proven that he knows the theatre as well as Mr. Smith does.

The fact, nevertheless, remains that what was evidently meant to be the most dramatic minute in the play makes no such impression on the public.

Miss Hurst's Little Situation.

It also is in the third act of "Back Pay" that the gifted authoress gently but firmly places her dainty foot on the pedal marked "Dramatic" and presses down hard with the toe of her ladies' and misses' AA. The gold diggers are feasting. One of them, who has been enjoying a liquid feast of several days' duration, reads from a newspaper of the arrival in New York of a wounded soldier supposed to be dead. He is the old home town lover of the hostess. So, leaving her guests, she learns the location of the hospital and in her cloth of gold dinner gown (marked up to \$1,000 for gold diggers) she sets out to find him.

There are still the sounds of feasting from behind the doors of the dining room. In vain has the protector requested that his beloved shall not go away. In vain, too, her friends cry after her. She goes out to search for the old love from Demopolis, Ohio. Miss Hurst has painted in this contrast of licentious indulgence and true love a genuinely dramatic background—dramatic that is for a novel. It is not in the least dramatic in a play.

In her black cloak covering the cloth of gold gown, the heroine creeps away. Not a soul is thrilled by the sight. Not a pulse beats a bit more quickly from the effect of this "situation" which Mrs. Hurst has built up. Yet she doubtless counted on immense theatrical effectiveness from the departure of the heroine under such conditions. Certainly the mise-en-scene had been elaborately prepared.

But the touch of the playwright in building the episode was lacking. Miss Hurst had neglected no step to insure the effectiveness of the printed page. How great the difference is between the medium and the other, the least experienced playwright does not have to be told.

At all events Miss Hurst has in "Back Pay" done everything to make her situation tell. Unfortunately she has evidently not worked with the means of the dramatist. Else the heroine would not depart from the scene of so much tainted luxury and vicious gaiety to the austere walls of a Brooklyn base hospital and leave no more impression on the minds of the spectators than if she were creeping out surreptitiously to get another pound of butter from Otto Kalbsmaul, the delicatessen dealer on the corner.

This is another situation in the current drama which with all the imagination expended in creating it accomplishes none of the purposes for which it was devised. If a situation does not thrill or move or amuse or excite, what is the use of it? Wise indeed are the dramatists of the day in discarding such a mechanical old device. They are especially wise if

they are not capable of handling them with somewhat more skill than Mr. Smith or Miss Hurst has shown. What a playwright of reliable powers might have accomplished, is of course another matter. Possibly the worst that such failure as the two playwrights have made will be the conviction that after all there is nothing in the "situation." The best corrective for that sort of a delusion is a visit to "Six Cylinder Love."

Miss Atkins Goes A-Hunting.

Arthur Hopkins never showed greater skill as a manager of actors than he did in training Miss Marjorie Rambeau to play her role in "Daddy's Gone A-Hunting." Miss Rambeau, who never possessed any special subtlety or penetrating fineness had grown mannered and artificial to a degree that seriously threatened her charm. Her habit of repeating a phrase to herself after she had spoken it aloud, her appearance of cogitating every assertion that she or one of her colleagues made, grew monotonous. Then there could be no illusion in the face of such a marked peculiarity.

Mr. Hopkins has apparently removed all these vexatious habits. She is sincere and natural again. Such a product as Miss Rambeau as little complex as a beautiful garden rose, not reflective, cerebral or especially analytical, acts now as one would expect such untrammelled loveliness to act.

While Mr. Hopkins's skill has been of undeniable benefit to the actress it is by no means sure that the change in her method is a benefit to Miss Atkins's play. "Daddy's Gone A-Hunting" treats in the terms of New York at the present day of the same theme that D'Annunzio used in "Gli Occhi" and Hauptmann in "Die Versunkene Glocke." But this artistic love never neither a model nor a dryad. If he loves anybody it is the fashionable patroness who lifted him above the drudgery of commercial art.

But it is the character of the wife which, like the heroine of "Francelin," is more important. She lives to see both the men she might love depart. Her husband confesses his own unworthiness and, as it were, resigns. The man who would prove his devotion to her she is unable to make up her mind to accept. Thus she is left at the end of the play alone.

Here is what might also have been called a "situation" at other times. But the playwrights who have dealt with this theme hitherto never have been satisfied with the condition that ends Miss Atkins's play. They probably rejected it as altogether undramatic. In life such a complication might well have come about. But even then it would never have been considered dramatic. In spite of the doctrines of the new dramatists, life cannot always be made dramatic even on the stage.

So the lot of the woman left alone, with her lover dismissed and her husband in entirely voluntary retirement, makes a situation no more effective than the others that have been described here. It is not that the play ends on an unresolved chord that makes its climax so flat. It does not end at all. The theatre prefers to have its problems settled before its eyes.

It is true that Nora Helmer never said where she was going or whether or not she was coming back. She went away, however, which was sufficiently definite an action to satisfy the audience. Had D'Annunzio or Hauptmann believed with Miss Atkins that nothingness was the logical end of their themes they would have selected others. Any condition of circumstance on the stage is probably not for the purposes of the playwright. In all events, D'Annunzio, Hauptmann and Dumas have rejected the conclusion that Miss Atkins adopted. Yet they seem altogether justified, judging by the interest that their plays aroused and the dulness which settles so thick over "Daddy's Gone A-Hunting."



Miss MAIRE O'NEILL in "The White Headed Boy" Henry Miller's Theatre.

MRS. LESLIE CARTER, ERNEST LAWFORD and JOHN DREW in "The Circle" The Selwyn Theatre



GIOVANNI GRASSO Italian Star, Playing at the Royal Theatre



'Spanish Love' to Be Played in Brooklyn

"Spanish Love," a drama with music, will be the week's attraction at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn. The drama is the joint work of Avery Hopwood and Mary Roberts Rinehart and will be presented with several of the original cast.

"Lightnin'" will enter its third and next to the last week at the Montauk Theatre to-morrow night.

The final curtain descends on the 1921 season of the New Brighton Theatre this evening, terminating the thirteenth year of this summertime playhouse. The closing bill, in order of appearance, will include Howard and Bruce, Ed Lowery and Irene Prince, Mabel Burke and Helen Bell Rush, Harry Delf, Charles Withers and company in "For Pity's Sake," George Bobbe and Eddie Nelson, Emma Carus and J. Walter Leopold and Berk and Sam.

"Rollo's Revue," Patricia and Bert Baker will be the triple headliners at the Orpheum. Others will be Fred Fenton and Sammy Fields, Richard Kean and company and Spencer and Williams.

Bert Errol will head the programme at the Bushwick.

Lorraine Howard and Verne Sadler will be the featured performers at the Boro Park.

Peck and Jennings's "Jazz Babies," with Evelyn Pryce, Matt Kolb and Frank "Rags" Murphy, will be the burlesque offering at the Star.

Paris Dancer Her Own Couturier

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"From Midnetta to Stage Darling" might be the title of the life history of Mistinguett, according to her friends, although the daring dancer herself refuses to be drawn into conversations regarding her career before the footlights and the tango arrived.

A casual visit to the Rue de la Paix dressmakers this week, however, found Mistinguett preparing her new robes for the winter season without the aid of mannequins or the expert assistance of the owners of the establishments.

With her mouth full of pins and needles of various colors heaped around her Mistinguett draped a model tastefully, pinning on bits of ribbon and countless beads, and then ordered the fashion fixers to have sewn within twenty-four hours a robe designed to startle social functions.

It is even rumored here that Mistinguett intends to open her own establishment when the craze for freak dancing dies out.

PEDRO DE CORDOBA as LAUNCELOT in "LAUNCELOT and ELAINE" Greenwich Village Theatre



MISS MARY RYAN in "Only 38" at The Cort



MISS SUE MACMANAMY in "True to Form" Bramhall Playhouse

Six New Plays on the Threshold.

MONDAY.

SELWYN THEATRE—The Selwyns will offer "The Circle," Somerset Maugham's comedy, which has been paying for more than a year at the Haymarket, London. John Drew and Mrs. Leslie Carter return to the stage as joint stars, the cast also including Miss Estelle Winwood and Ernest Lawford.

GREENWICH VILLAGE THEATRE—Edwin Milton Royle's romantic drama, "Launcest and Elaine," with Pedro de Cordoba featured as Launcest, and the author's daughters, Josephine and Selena Royle, will play the roles of Elaine and Queen Guinevere. The play is a drama in four acts and a prologue, dealing with King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

BRAMHALL PLAYHOUSE—The first offering of the season of the Actors' Repertory Theatre, "True to Form," comedy by Augustin MacHugh, cast including Edwin Nicander, Miss Sue MacManamy, Miss Eugenie Blair and Miss Verna Wilkins.

TUESDAY.

CORT THEATRE—Sam H. Harris will present "Only 38," new comedy by A. E. Thomas, author of "The Rainbow" and "Just Suppose." The company includes Miss Mary Ryan, Harry C. Browne, Percy Pollock, Miss Kate Mayhew and Miss Helen Van Hoose. The play has been staged by Sam Forrest.

WEDNESDAY.

ASTOR THEATRE—"The Blue Lagoon," a dramatization of H. De Vere Stacpoole's novel, presented by the Shuberts. Miss Frances Carson heads the cast. It was directed by Basil Dean, who staged it in London.

THURSDAY.

HENRY MILLER'S THEATRE—Charles Dillingham will present "The White Headed Boy," Lennox Robinson's three act comedy of Irish rural life, which was presented for the first time at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Irish Players in 1916, after which it was played continuously more than five years in Ireland, Scotland and England. The cast comes from the Abbey Theatre and includes Miss Maire O'Neill, Arthur Sinclair, Sydney Morgan, Miss Maureen Delany and Miss Norah Desmond.

Daphne Pollard in Vaudeville Bill

Miss Daphne Pollard, singing comedienne, will be headlined at the Palace this week, returning to Broadway after six years of success in London. Miss Pollard gives such characterizations of the "nut" type. Thomas Dixon's play, "A Man of the People," condensed into a one act drama, will be offered with Frederick Burton playing Abraham Lincoln. Others will be the Ford Sisters, Val and Ernie Stanton, Huston Ray, William and Joe Mandel, Charles Withers and Joe Darcy.

The chief acts at other vaudeville houses follow: RIVERSIDE—Emma Carus, Ed Gallagher and Al Shean. EIGHTY-FIRST STREET—"The Only Girl," Betty Compton in the photoplay, "At the End of the World." ALHAMBRA—"Two Little Pals," Frank Van Hoven. ROYAL—Robert Emmett Keane, Whipple Huston and company. FORDHAM—Ivan Bankoff, Miller and Mack. LORE'S STAGE—Frank Fay, Rome and Cullen, Charles Ray in the photoplay, "The Midnight Bell." PROCTOR'S FIFTH AVENUE—Jack Donahue and Roy La Pearl.

Baby Parade at Coney Feature of Carnival Week

One of the features of Coney Island's Mardi Gras which begins to-morrow is the Baby Parade to be conducted in conjunction with the pageant on Saturday afternoon, September 17. Hundreds of youngsters, attired in gay costumes, riding on floats, in decorated carriages and walking will participate. William Sellick, chairman of the committee, announces that parents are requested to have their children in front of the Municipal Baths, Surf avenue and West Fifth street, at 1:30 P. M., for position in the line. One thousand dollars have been allotted for 150 prizes. The judges named are Mayor John E. Hyman, ex-Gov. Alfred E. Smith, Borough President of Brooklyn, Edward Riegelmann, Borough President of Manhattan, Henry H. Curran, County Judge Reuben Haskell, Edward T. O'Loughlin, Peter Seery, ex-Congressman Daniel J. Griffin, Park Commissioner John N. Harman, and District Attorney Harry E. Lewis of Kings County.

Everything is in readiness at George C. Tilyou's Steeplechase Park, Coney Island, for a gala week. A special programme of novelties has been arranged. On Tuesday evening there will be a competition to decide the owner of the prettiest ankle. During the week dance contests will be held each evening and prizes of loving cups awarded the winners.

Luna Park has been busily preparing for the carnival week, and special performances will be given by the bands, the circus and the various side shows.

Returning vacationists find great sport in the surf at Palisades Amusement Park, as this "inland sea" permits them to continue sea water bathing practically at home. The pool will continue in operation every day during September, with band concerts in the afternoon.



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